

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2610

As of February 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to identifying characteristics of the homeless youth population.

Brief Description: Identifying characteristics of the homeless youth population.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Fey, Kagi, Freeman, Fitzgibbon, Sawyer, Senn, Bergquist, Walkinshaw, Lytton, Ryu, Farrell, Jinkins, Robinson, Roberts, Gregerson, Santos and Pollet).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/14/14, 71-25.

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 2/27/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Joan Miller (786-7784)

Background: In Washington, data on adults and youth experiencing homelessness are collected in several ways. For example, the Department of Commerce conducts an annual homeless census that counts homeless individuals living outdoors, in shelters, and in transitional housing. A summary of the Washington homeless census is made public each year.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction also collects data each year on homeless children and youth served by school districts in Washington. The information collected is used to determine if homeless youth and children have access to a free, appropriate public education.

Additionally, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) has conducted evaluations on housing supports and evaluations that examined characteristics of street youth, use of HOPE centers and Responsible Living Skills programs, and services provided to program participants.

Summary of Bill: WSIPP must conduct an analysis to identify characteristics of the homeless youth population ages birth to ten years. WSIPP must also pursue information gathering techniques with organizations that provide services to homeless youth and their families to identify barriers to accessing services, whether the services available meet the need of the homeless population, and whether there are services needed by this population

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that are not available. To the extent possible, WSIPP must identify the number of homeless youth in Washington from birth to ten years of age and the average length of homelessness for this population. The report is due to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2014.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: I have a strong interest in making sure younger children have an opportunity to succeed in life. During the last interim, I learned that we know very little about children before they enter our school system. As we all know, the sooner we help youngsters, the better off we will all be. Rather than come in and propose an expansion of a particular program, I thought the best first step would be to gather some good, hard data on this population and to see how this population can be better served. Wellspring Family Services has been serving homeless families for over 120 years. One of the things we have learned is that if we are going to get to the root cause of homelessness, we really have to pay attention to the kids. Last summer, we had some concerns with our existing child care program, and when we sat down with the prime sponsor, we realized we knew absolutely nothing about how many homeless children are in our state. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction does a great job of counting homeless children in the K-12 system, and we can assume that many of them have younger siblings. But if we want to make an impact for these most vulnerable children, we need to make some data-driven decisions. Of course, the first step to doing that is to get the data. The bill right now is a one-time report, and Partners for Our Children (POC) has been working with the prime sponsor and other advocates to see if there is a way to have this information available on an ongoing basis. We are working on a way to do this without impacting the fiscal note.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Fey, prime sponsor; Melanie Smith, Wellspring Family Services; Laurie Lippold, POC.